

RESEARCH AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Every School Day Counts Detroit is a community-led collective impact effort to improve the conditions that impact student attendance and engagement in Detroit. Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have worked with partners across the city to identify student needs, provide social supports, and ensure that students had the technology and other resources they needed to engage school during school closures. We gathered the research findings and resources below to support school leaders as they prepare to meet students' needs during the school year, whether students will be in face-to-face instruction or in distance learning.

The [Detroit Education Research Partnership](#) at Wayne State University interviewed 29 Detroit high school students during the school closures of the 2019-20 school year. They found:

- Although most students said they were participating consistently in distance learning, 28% had not participated at all. Nearly 90% of the students who had not participated at all had been chronically absent from school in the Fall 2019 semester. There were also differences in participation by school, with students in some schools all or nearly all participating and in others where few were participating.
- Students described many reasons for not participating, including: lack of information, problems with technology, family responsibilities, and disinterest.
- Nearly 40% of the students personally knew someone who had contracted COVID-19, and a quarter knew someone who had died from the disease. They spoke about the negative impact of these events on their families, particularly their parents.
- Students expressed mixed feelings about going back to school in the fall. Many students said they were eager to go back, but they were concerned about getting sick or bringing the disease back to their families.

Based on local and national research, and Every School Day Counts Detroit's work with educators and families during the pandemic, we recommend the following:

- The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) should work with districts to define and measure attendance during the pandemic. It should be clear what "counts" as attending school on a given day, particularly for distance learning. This definition may need to be different for students at different grade levels, and it should account for both the frequency and the level of engagement of participation. MDE should also work with districts to adopt a more comprehensive data framework (e.g., [Monitoring Attendance in Distance Learning](#)) that supports identifying students at risk due to prior chronic absence, lack of working contact information, challenges with connectivity, little or no relationships to the school community, or lack of participation in learning opportunities.
- Students who were chronically absent in the 2019-20 school year may be more likely to face barriers to school participation during the pandemic, whether online or face-to-face. Before the start of the school year, schools should be in contact with families of previously chronically absent students to identify potential barriers and provide resources and support to ensure that students can be engaged. Here are two resources from Attendance Works that districts and schools can use to support this work:
 - [Attendance Works' Transition Analysis Tools](#)
 - [Attendance Works' Transition Planning Tool](#)

- If students are in face-to-face instruction only part time, the days they are supposed to be in school will be all the more critical to their success. Yet, the students most likely to benefit from face-to-face are also the students who have the most barriers to school attendance. Schools and districts must consider radical new models to ensure that students can physically get to school safely on the days they are required to be there, including more individualized transportation support. Districts may want to encourage families to enroll in their neighborhood schools so that K-8 students can access school-provided transportation.
- Schools must provide clear and consistent information to parents and high school youth about how they should be participating in distance learning. Lack of participation should be addressed quickly, since it may indicate that students do not know when classes are taking place or how to participate, or they may lack the required technology.
- Whether in person or online, students will need socioemotional support when they come back to school this fall. Many students have witnessed the impact of COVID-19 firsthand; all students have experienced life during a pandemic, often with significant disruptions in schooling and social and family routines and resources. Many students are scared about contracting the virus themselves or infecting a loved one. Students will need caring adults, opportunities to strengthen positive relationships with their peers, and a sense of belonging and connection with their schools. School teams should consider the following strategies for supporting students:
 - Wellness checks
 - Mentoring (i.e. a caring adult, buddy system, check-in and check-out)
 - When safe to do so, socially distanced in-person opportunities to meet teachers and classmates even when instruction will be online
 - [Reunite Renew Thrive Social Emotional Roadmap from CASEL](#)
 - Supporting families in accessing mental health services
- High school youth need support in developing schedules to ensure that they complete their schoolwork and to provide important routines to structure their days. Many high school youth have taken on new responsibilities at work or at home since the pandemic, and schools and community-based organizations must ensure that they have what they need to fulfill their educational and familial commitments.

Here are some additional resources that may be useful for districts and schools:

[Attendance Playbook from Attendance Works](#)

[Using Chronic Absence Data to Improve Conditions for Learning](#)

[Send the Message that Showing Up Matters! - Attendance Awareness Campaign 2020](#)

Learn more about Every School Day Counts Detroit at our website:

<https://www.everyschooldaycountsdetroit.org/>

